

Editor.

No. 41

It can be seen from the reports in this present newsletter that there is now a focus on considering the future of the church. This could be seen as a difficult issue to resolve as we live in an increasingly secular society. But there is always hope. This has been amply demonstrated by the story of the famous 'Sycamore Gap Tree', located on the Roman wall in Northumberland, which was illegally cut down a year ago in September. The old tree is no more, but from the stump new shoots have arisen, which have been nurtured into saplings - new trees to be distributed around the country as a symbol of hope in difficult times.

This is an encouraging thought to hold onto as we consider the challenges of the change required to adapt effectively the benefits of faith in Christ to modern conditions in our various communities.

Such essential adaptations may be a long, difficult process - but as is said, about any long journey: it must start with the first step.

Such a first step starts as we read about the progress so far and then give serious thought and prayer as to how we, as individuals, can play our part by suggesting new ideas or volunteering to support new projects.

As people of faith this is what we were called to do, as generations of people did in times past. As people of the present, we must continue the 'Great Mission' to spread the 'Good News' of our Lord Jesus.
Ray Tunnicliffe.

CHURCH MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

A Church Meeting was held on Sunday, 8th, September, after morning worship.

The main issue was a proposal about the future function of the Cleveland Pastorate, which incorporates the seven URC churches in the Teesside area.

At a recent meeting of the Pastorate, attended by church representatives and the Synod Moderator, Rev. Kim Plumpton, where in the absence of any minister showing an interest in considering accepting a call to serve our local churches, a discussion ensued on the purpose and future direction for the local churches in our area. Various thoughts and ideas were expressed, which were passed onto the fellowships to continue the conversation and present their views to be sent to the Synod for further consideration by the Synod's Pastoral Committee in October.

Since that meeting the Group Eldership of churches south of the river Tees discussed the main issues and presented a proposal for the people of the member churches to consider. In summary is as follows:-

- This meeting asks that their representatives continue to engage with the Synod and discerning a way forward for the vacancy.
- This meeting asks that the option of the East Cleveland group withdrawing from the Cleveland Pastorate and continuing under lay leadership with support from Synod is included in these discussions.

- The meeting asks for a formal report of progress to be made to the church meetings in early 2025.

That followed an open discussion about this proposal when areas were discussed. The meeting voted against this motion.

And alternative motion was put to the meeting for consideration. It was proposed that by reshaping the Pastorate - in reducing the number of churches from seven to five, it may be more likely to attract a minister. As there was some support for this motion it will be presented to the Pastorate meeting on 25th, September.

PROPERTY REPORT The focus at the present time is to prepare the church for the rental market as soon as possible. Other projects such as the south gable wall repair and the acquisition of a sound system may need to be put in abeyance for a short time.

PREACHING PLAN

The secretary reported that the October quarter of the preaching plan was completed. October 6th will be the Harvest Service led by Jan Harper of Marton URC.

There will be Pastorate Service at St Columba's, Billingham on Sunday, 13th, October where the Synod Moderator, Rev Kim Plumpton will lead worship.

The three Christmas dates will be taken by our resident lay preacher, Dr Donna Moore.

CHURCHES TOGETHER & THE BRIDGE ASSOCIATION

There will be no cards with details of Christmas services, held in Guisborough, being distributed around the town this year. Information about News and current events needed for the Facebook page and arrangements for the January Week of Prayer for Christian and the Lent Groups will be discussed at the next meeting.

Details of the Bridge Prayer Breakfast will need to be confirmed later as Guisborough URC have usually hosted this date.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PASTORATE MEETING

A meeting of Cleveland Pastorate Vacancy Committee was held on Wednesday, 25th, September at St Columba's Church, Billingham - attended by representatives of the churches in the Teesside area.

The main issue of the meeting was the follow up from the previous meeting when the future direction, of the Pastorate was discussed with the Synod Moderator, Rev Kim Plumpton and the Chair of the Synod Pastoral Group, Rev Kate Hackett. These conversations were to continue in the local churches with each fellowship's views being forwarded to the Synod pastoral committee for consideration in October.

It was noted that the Rev Ray Angelsea would continue as a 'Pastoral Friend' for another year.

Before each church presented their views, on the future of the Pastorate, some disappointment was expressed about contribution made by the Synod representatives - which

appeared to lack any new, positive, practical ideas upon which a really constructive conversation could be developed during the course of the discussions.

In summary, each church representative gave an account of news of the present state of their fellowship and some observations or ideas for the Synod Pastoral committee to consider, as requested at the previous meeting.

BILLINGHAM. Things are going well, and they are seeing an increase in community environment, but no significant impact on Sunday worship. The church has a much stronger presence within the area due to the hard work of the CRCW - a Church Related Community Worker.

STOCKTON. Not a happy picture, but some positives to share. There continues to be a strong commitment to Sunday worship with more members willing to take part. The number of active members have declined steadily and there hasn't been any growth. The location of the building makes it difficult to access at night and any community activities are limited by the lack of available people for support.

HARTLEPOOL. In recent times they have seen a slow growth in membership from different sources. Working together with a Methodists and exploring into the prospect of an LEP - local ecumenical project.

GUISBOROUGH. The church benefits from the support of a meeting as a group of elders between the three churches of the former East Cleveland group. Thought of the offer made at the last meeting of the East Cleveland churches go it alone and leave the Pastorate. However, if we decided on that route the possible problems may outweigh the benefits. The further radical reshaping of the Pastorate was considered with some discussion about the level of Synod support on offer.

From these conversations a number of important issues emerged. First, it was thought important that we had a 'reality check' on the present state of the churches. This would involve an update of the Pastorate profile so that we offer an accurate picture of the various fellowships in the Teesside area for any incoming minister who may be interested in accepting a call to service.

Marton Church thought that the present Pastorate, with seven churches, could work with 1.5 ministers and that the updated, profiles of the member churches may attract a ministerial response given some time.

Redcar Church, now combined with the local Baptists, has, in addition, a Mission House set out as a residence for a church community worker. Such an arrangement may persuade Synod that some ministerial input could be of real value and help to produce growth

and renewal of the local fellowship.

In Hartlepool the local fellowship has been working closely with the Methodist for some time and this is likely to develop into full LEP - Local Ecumenical Project. The inclusion of a Methodist minister would solve the ministerial provision in that area and should be encouraged by Synod.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PASTORATE SERVICE.

A Cleveland Pastorate Service for all seven URC Churches on Teesside, has been arranged for Sunday, 13th, October at 11.00am, in St Columba's Church Billingham.

The worship will be prepared and led by the Synod Moderator, the Rev. Kim Plumpton. Churches were asked to bring buffet style food, savoury and sweet, by arrangement according to the various fellowships.

As part of the service each church is invited to have representative to present their fellowship's answers to two questions, viz:-

- Where is the greatest need in your community?
- If Synod gave you £100,000 what would you do with it?

Challenging questions so interesting when the answers are revealed to us all.

NATIONAL CHURCH NEWS

Church Life Review

The Reverend Dr John Bradbury, URC General Secretary writes: "The story of the Church Life Review begins with a decision to accept, name and understand the hard reality that faces us, and find ways to respond.

"There are fewer and fewer people to take on the responsibilities of a local church life. There is frustration in churches that want to do things, but haven't got the Human Resources. Elders and ministers are stretched finely and a lot of the time is taken up with things that don't feel like the reason we want to be a church."

"So some things were clear from the start: we need to find ways to offer more support to local churches; we need more efficient structures; we need to reduce some of our outgoings; we need to invest resources in areas of work that thrive and grow."

"Firstly, we engaged to the thinktank Theos to explore the life of the URC, what our vocation is. Secondly, we undertook forensic accounting to give us for the first time a picture of where our money is and what we spend it on. Thirdly, we have streamlined our central operations."

"Thanks to stage one of the Church Life Review, for the first time we've got some clear accounts of all of this but enable us to begin to work from a common place."

The September edition of the Reform magazine focuses on the URC's Church Life Review, and you can get a free copy of the latest issue. Email reformsubs@urc.org.uk or call 020 7520 2721.

The issues raised, in the Church Life Review, about the future of the URC in an increasingly secular society, are crucially important and need the prayerful thought and consideration by all

church fellowships, if we are grow in the renewal which will have an impact on our local communities by showing the true value of faith in the modern world.

SERVICES FOR OCTOBER at 10.00am.

6th. Jan Harper Marton URC - Harvest
13th. Pastoral Service St Columba's B'ingham
20th. Rev Keith Martin Lingdale
27th. Brian Stephenson - Redcar Methodist

Everyone will welcome at our services. Come to worship, or to learn more about faith in Jesus, or simply to find some good friends.

COFFEE MORNING AND PRAYER MEETING

Every Thursday there is a Coffee Morning in the church hall from 9:30 am to 11:30 am, followed by a Prayer Meeting at 11:30 am until noon in the church. The church is open for private prayer from 10.30am to 11.30am.

October 2024

GUISBOROUGH UNITED REFORMED CHURCH



Founded 1798

56, Westgate, Guisborough.

News Letter

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Secretary 01287 637273